

New Zealand Plant Conservation Network officially launched

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New Zealand is world renowned as a biodiversity hotspot; 80 percent of New Zealand's vascular plant species are found nowhere else in the world. In a recent conservation assessment, 119 indigenous vascular plant taxa were classified as acutely threatened in New Zealand with a further 102 taxa in decline. In addition, 89 bryophyte and 50 fungi taxa are also acutely threatened (for definitions of New Zealand's new threat categories see www.nzpcn.org.nz).

Threatened plant species include the Chatham Island forget-me-not (*Myosotidium hortensia*) (see Figure 1) and the kakabeak (*Clianthus puniceus* — featured on the front cover of this bulletin). Both face extinction in the wild as a result of human development, spread of weeds and damage caused by animal pests. The need for collaboration to ensure protection for these species has never been greater, and the establishment of a national plant network in New Zealand provides one mechanism to achieve this. Preventing the extinction of New Zealand's most threatened native plants and plant communities is the vision of the New Zealand Plant Conservation Network, officially launched in Wellington (New Zealand) in early August.

Over 100 people attended the inaugural meeting, including botanists, horticulturalists and representatives of restoration groups, botanic gardens, zoos, local councils, universities and the Department of Conservation. The main focus of the meeting was the protection and recovery of threatened plants and their associated communities, structured around the targets of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC). Those present discussed global and national plant conservation issues and developed strategies and priorities for action to prevent further decline in indigenous species.

Dr Kingsley Dixon (President of the Australian Network for Plant Conservation) gave the opening address to the network. He described the 16 targets of the GSPC, which involve the protection of important plant areas, education and training, cultivation of threatened species and species restoration. He explained how by establishing a network New Zealand had already implemented Target 16 of the Global Strategy. Kingsley then talked briefly about the work of the ANPC (for example, its training programmes) and described how the network was approaching its eleventh birthday.

Peter de Lange (Chief Plant Conservation Scientist at the Department of Conservation) then outlined the precarious nature of New Zealand's threatened plants and identified



Figure 1. The threatened species *Myosotidium hortensia* (Chatham Island forget-me-not). Photo: Gillian Crowcroft

key areas for future work including biosystematics, legal protection of plants and the need to include cryptogams and fungi in conservation programmes.

Sir Paul Reeves, former Governor-General of New Zealand, launched the Network and received gifts from the Network in the form of threatened plants to be used in local restoration projects. The new national website (www.nzpcn.org.nz) devoted to native plant conservation was then launched. The site is intended to provide information about native plant conservation in New Zealand and, in particular, information about threatened species and key people.

Workshops were held in the afternoon to determine how New Zealand is to implement the GSPC. Some key recommendations and conclusions from the workshops were that:

- The Network should act as a coordinating body encouraging development of lists of threatened plants

and communities (both national and regional) and promoting involvement of all agencies and the public.

- The Network should help to **collect information** needed to be able to complete threatened species lists. It should also publicise gaps in knowledge of biodiversity (e.g., algae, fungi, bryophytes and data deficient species) and raise awareness of reasons to protect plant communities and species.
- An **Important Plant Area project** in New Zealand would be good advocacy for plant conservation in New Zealand and throughout Oceania, good for providing a baseline of the current state of important plant areas in New Zealand and for prioritising future protection efforts for native plant life.
- The Network should **act as the lead organisation** for the Important Plant Area project, establishing a key stakeholder group and coordinating meetings to develop a national process for the project.
- Greater protection for acutely threatened plants in New Zealand is a high priority and the Network **should pursue legal protection** for native plants through scoping out issues and options and reviewing overseas experience.
- The Network should **identify plant conservation education resources** and programmes that currently exist (i.e., undertake a stocktake) and promote examples of good practice.
- The Network should **identify gaps** in plant conservation education and aim to fill the gaps by preparing and implementing an education strategy.

Opportunities for linkages between the work of the Australian and New Zealand plant conservation networks became clearer during the day. These could be through representation on committees; through combined use of the ANPC's bulletin *Australasian Plant Conservation*; through collaboration on projects such as establishing Australasian



Figure 3. The threatened scarlet mistletoe, *Peraxilla colensoi*.
Photo: David Norton

guidelines for threatened plant monitoring; assisting with weed research on native species causing problems in each others' countries; or running plant training courses throughout Oceania. Collaboration may also provide opportunities for work throughout Australasia and Oceania to increase awareness of plant conservation issues and to improve plant conservation programmes.

Since its establishment in April 2003, the New Zealand Plant Conservation Network has grown to over 150 members and will play a key coordinating role in the drive to ensure protection for New Zealand's plant life.

Membership of the New Zealand Plant Conservation Network is open to any individual, group or government agency. You can join directly on the web site or download a copy of the membership form. Costs to join are as follows: individual: NZ\$30; concession: NZ\$20; corporate: NZ\$200; NGO: NZ\$75

For more information, or to join the network, please contact us as follows:

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Figure 2. Shrubby tororaro, *Muehlenbeckia astonii*, another threatened plant in New Zealand. Photo: Jeremy Rolfe



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